

License fees:

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placement license plates, will increase as well, and owners must now show a current Washington state driver's license when they renew license tabs or register a vehicle for the first time.

That change in the law, aimed at sales tax cheaters, ensures that motorists who have a car registered in Washington don't have a driver's license from another state, Benfield said. Those out-of-state licenses can be used to claim an exemption from Washington's sales tax.

The fee increases were part of Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6103, passed in April 2005 by the state House and Senate and signed in May by Gov. Christine Gregoire. The bill also included the phased 9.5-cent gas tax increase that was the subject of the failed Initiative 912. Voters narrowly rejected 912 in November. I-912 did not address the tab fee increases, however.

The 46-page Senate Bill 6103, co-sponsored by Dan Swecker, R-Rochester, and Mary Margaret Haugen, D-Camano Island, drew bipartisan support: seven Republicans joined 19 Senate Democrats for passage there. In the House, where the bill passed 54-43, 12 Republicans were among the supporters.

Annual tab fees have stood at \$30 for most vehicles since 2000. Voters overwhelmingly approved tax-activist Tim Eymann's Initiative 695 in 1999; it dumped the much-hated value-based motor vehicle excise tax and established the \$30 fee. Although a judge found I-695 unconstitutional in March 2000, legislators took the voters' hint and quickly enacted the \$30 tabs into law.

The gas tax and tab fees in Senate Bill 6103 will raise an estimated \$7.1 billion for 274 transportation projects over the next 16 years, including \$244 million in Clark County.

Skamania County, with only about 10,000 residents, has no projects on that list.

The phased 9.5-cent gas tax increase is expected to raise \$5.5 billion.

The new tab fees will raise this much for transportation projects:

\$908 million: From weight-based fees on passenger cars. (Unlike federal motor-vehicle safety regulators, Washington regards SUVs as passenger cars.)

\$436 million: From a light-truck weight-based fee.

\$130 million: From a motor home tab fee of \$75 in addition to today's \$30 charge.

PAYING BY THE POUND

With the exception of motor homes, Washington's new tab fees are based on vehicle weight when empty (for cars and SUVs) or "declared gross weight" in the case of trucks, including pickups, and commercial vehicles.

Cars, SUVs

For cars and SUVs, the new tab fee will be in addition to the existing \$30 fee, plus other fees and taxes that may be charged, and be based on the vehicle's weight:

■ \$10 additional for vehicles weighing 4,000 pounds or less. (Most passenger cars and small trucks, some minivans.)

■ \$20 additional for vehicles of 4,001 to 6,000 pounds. (Generally, larger minivans, midsize SUVs and some large SUVs.)

■ \$20 additional for vehicles of 6,001 to 8,000 pounds. (Large SUVs.)

Trucks, commercial vehicles

Trucks and commercial vehicles — this would also include cars or SUVs registered for commercial use — will be charged additional tab fees based on the vehicles' declared gross weight, which is listed on renewal forms. State Department of Licensing spokesman Brad Benfield said the declared gross weight is usually 150 percent of a vehicle's empty weight. In some cases, the weight declaration is by the owner.

The fee had been \$30 for all of the following categories. The new total fee:

■ \$40 total for vehicles with a declared gross weight of up to 4,000 pounds.

■ \$50 total for vehicles with a declared gross weight of 4,001 to 6,000 pounds.

■ \$60 total for vehicles with a declared gross weight of 6,001 to 8,000 pounds.

Fees for larger trucks are unchanged.

Other changes

Another steep increase will be the cost of replacing license plates: from the current \$3.50 per plate to \$12 per plate.

There is one fee reduction: the cost of licensing a private-use, single-axle trailer weighing less than 2,000 pounds goes from \$30 to \$15.

— Thomas Ryll

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ON THE WEB

For more information, visit

■ www.leg.wa.gov/legislative

Click on "bill information" and type 6103 in the "search by bill number" box to bring up the 46-page text of 6103.

■ www.wsdot.wa.gov

Click on "accountability" and "2005 Partnership Program funding and project list" for information on the money raised by the increased vehicle license fees and phased-in 9.5-cent gas tax.

